

What is Claimed is:

1. A method of screening email comprising the steps of:
  - providing an email address for receiving incoming email;
  - providing a list of approved email sources that are authorized to send email
- 5 messages to the email address;
  - receiving an incoming email addressed to the email address;
  - identifying the source of the incoming email message;
  - delivering the incoming email message to the email address if the source is
- an approved email source;
- 10 temporarily blocking delivery of the email to the receiving address and storing the incoming email message if the source of the incoming email is an approved email source;
- sending an email to the source of the blocked email message requesting authentication of the source by entry of a reply command by the source;
- 15 if no reply is received to the source authorization request, rejecting the temporarily stored incoming email message;
- if a reply is received responsive to the source authorization request, comparing the source of the reply to the source of the incoming email message; and,
- if the source of the reply is the same as the source of the incoming email,
- 20 delivering the incoming email to the email address.

2. A method according to claim 1 further comprising:

inserting a first predetermined series of characters in the authenticating email header of the authenticating email, and,

- 5 wherein the step of comparing the source of the reply to the source of the incoming email message including the step of determining if the reply email header includes the first predetermined series of characters.

3. A method according to claim 2 further comprising:

the authenticating email having a subject box;

- 10 inserting a second predetermined series of characters in the authenticating email subject box; and,

determining if the reply email includes a subject box containing the second predetermined series of characters.

- 15 4. A method according to claim 1 wherein the step of comparing the source of the reply to the source of the incoming email message further comprises:

comparing the email header field of the incoming email message to the email header of the reply;

- 20 delivering the incoming email to the email address for receiving incoming email if a predetermined number of the reply email header fields and the incoming message fields match; and,

rejecting the incoming email if less than a predetermined number of the  
reply email header fields and the incoming message fields match.

5        5.        A method according to claim 4 wherein the email header fields are selected  
from the group consisting of the return-path field, the reply-to field, the X-sender field, the  
FROM field, the X-mailer field, the message-ID field, and the connecting IP address field.

10        6.        A method according to claim 4 wherein the predetermined number of email  
header fields is at least 2.

7.        A method according to claim 4 wherein the predetermined number of email  
header fields is at least 3.

15        8.        A method according to claim 4 wherein the predetermined number of email  
header fields is at least 4.

9.        A method according to claim 4 wherein the predetermined number of email  
header fields is at least 5.

20        10.       A method according to claim 4 wherein the first predetermined series of  
characters in the authenticating email header of the authenticating email comprises  
"sourceauthentication:"